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ABSTRACT

Annual surveys by the Association for School, College, and University Staffing show that various categories of special education are among the major areas of personnel shortage in all of education. Especially severe areas of shortage occur in the areas of emotional disturbance/behavior disorders, learning disabilities, and multiple/severe handicaps. In addition to shortages of instructional personnel, the National Easter Seal Society reports that the supply of occupational therapists has leveled off while the need for such rehabilitation personnel is growing. Other statistics from various sources reflect: anticipated enrollment increases in public schools, the number of new teachers needed per year, the attrition rate for teachers, the rate of emergency certification, and the development of alternative certification policies. A list of references is included. (JDD)

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Personnel Supply and Demand: A Context for Special Education

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Personnel Supply and Demand: A Context for Special Education

Annual surveys by the Association for School, College, and University Staffing show that various categories of special education are among the major areas of personnel shortage in all of education. Special education shortages are second only to those in bilingual education. Personnel for instruction of students with emotional disturbance/behavior disorders, learning disabilities, and multiple/severe handicaps represent the second, third, and fourth largest shortage areas, respectively, in all of education in the United States (Akin, 1988).

Shortages are also reported among mental retardation personnel, audiologists, teachers of hearing-impaired students, teachers of gifted students, and school psychologists. Shortages in all of these categories have been gradually worsening in recent years (Akin, 1988). The early childhood special education requirements of Public Law 99-457 have recently created a great demand for personnel to serve infant, toddler, and preschool handicapped populations, and early indications from the states suggest that the supply of these personnel is extremely inadequate (National CSPD Caucus, 1988).

Annual surveys also show considerable shortages in the general education disciplines of physics, mathematics, chemistry, computer science, data processing, modern language/Spanish, library science, and earth science. Over the years since 1976, the one teaching field with a considerable surplus of teachers continues to be physical education (Akin, 1988).

Aside from shortages of instructional personnel, the National Easter Seal Society reports that an inequality of supply and demand exists within the rehabilitation professions. While the need for rehabilitation is growing, the supply of occupational therapists has leveled off, with approximately 2300 therapists and 900 assistants entering the field each year. In physical therapy, the nation will need 42 percent more personnel than are currently employed, and the situation in rehabilitation nursing is exacerbated by the general shortage of nurses (National Easter Seal Society, 1988).

At the same time, the National Center for Education Statistics reports that, between 1987 and 1997, the population of children aged 5 to 13 will increase by 10 percent, and the population of youth aged 14 to 17 will increase by 4 percent (whereas the population aged 5 to 24 decreased between 1977 and 1987). During the coming decade, the total enrollment in the public schools is expected to increase by 9 percent, and 9 percent more teachers will be needed (whereas the total number of teachers increased by only 3 percent between 1977 and 1987) (National Center for Education Statistics, 1988, April and July).

In numerical terms, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (1988) says the nation will need 200,000 new teachers per year until the mid 1990's, which is a 100 percent increase over current levels. Similarly, by

1990 it is estimated that approximately 700,000 fewer persons will be entering the labor force each year than in 1984, but there will be approximately 800,000 more pupils entering elementary school each year than there were in 1984 (Wendling & Woodbury, 1984).

The National Education Association estimates that only half of the teachers entering the field remain more than five years (Futrell, 1986). The 1988 Metropolitan Life survey of American teachers (Louis Harris & Associates, 1988) revealed that 34 percent of all teachers say they will leave the field in the coming five years. Among personnel in special education, the proportion of younger teachers appears to be greater than for general education, and the overall rate of attrition appears to be higher (Lauritzen, 1988).

Another indication of personnel shortages is seen in the rate of emergency certification. The National Education Association has stated that, in 1980, 103,000 teachers were assigned to instructional areas for which they were not prepared and, as of 1982, emergency certificates represented 10 to 20 percent of all certificates issued in seven of the nation's largest states (Futrell, 1986). According to a 1985-86 survey, emergency certification in special education is on a national average of approximately 30 percent (McLaughlin, Smith-Davis, & Burke, 1986).

Due to shortages of teachers, 23 states had established alternative certification policies by the middle of 1988, for the purpose of shortening the route from training to teaching. Four additional states have proposed alternative certification, and twelve more are considering it (Feistritzer, 1988). These alternative procedures apply largely to general education certification, although several states are instituting alternative procedures for special education.

Both problems and solutions associated with the quantity of personnel have a heavy impact on the quality of instruction. Policies intended to address one aspect of education tend to affect other aspects, with results that are not always anticipated. According to the Educational Testing Service (1985), few states or institutions are gathering the type of data necessary to determine the impact of quality improvement measures on the supply and quality of new personnel from higher education, and state policies are failing to consider their impact on teacher supply and demand.

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